

Few set up trust fund to care for kin with disabilities



Mr Tan Ngan Seng (left) opened an account with the Special Needs Trust Company for his cousin Ong Yeow Ping, who has intellectual disability, and applied to be his deputy - which allowed him to help Mr Ong sell his inherited flat. Mr Ong lacked the mental capacity to authorise the flat's sale. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

🕒 PUBLISHED 10 HOURS AGO

Non-profit body seeks to get elderly parents, caregivers to make plans before they pass on

✉
Kok Xing Hui (mailto:kxinghui@sph.com.sg)

Although many parents of those with disabilities worry about what will happen to their children after they die, few have taken action by opening trust accounts to look after them.

When Mr Ong Yeow Ping, 38, who has intellectual disability, lost his mother in 2004, for example, he inherited her four-room flat, savings and insurance payouts.

But the money ran out in 2014, after being used to pay for his fees at Metta Home for the Disabled and the expenses of his elderly father, who died in 2012.

Mr Ong needed to sell the flat to fund his stay at the home, but his late father's relatives had moved in and they refused to leave. He also lacked the mental capacity to authorise its sale.

447 Number of SNTC accounts that have been opened as of this month. Two years ago, there were 300.

3% Percentage of resident population of 3.9 million who have disabilities, estimated by the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

19 Number of accounts that have started paying out money to dependants.

WHAT IF...

Even if you can find somebody you trust to take care of your child when you die, what if the child outlives his caregiver?

AdChoices [>]

MS ESTHER TAN, general manager of the Special Needs Trust Company, saying an account with it is a crucial safeguard.



His cousin Tan Ngan Seng, 55, a retired civil servant, then opened an account for Mr Ong with the Special Needs Trust Company (SNTC) and applied to be Mr Ong's deputy - which allowed him to sell the flat.

Under the Mental Capacity Act of 2008, a deputy can make decisions for those with mental disability, and the SNTC account allowed Mr Tan to create a trust fund for Mr Ong.

When the four-room flat was finally sold last December, his father's relatives relented and moved out. The \$313,236 from the sale was credited into Mr Ong's trust - an amount that can fund him for the rest of his life, according to a care plan drawn up by social workers and Mr Tan.

SNTC, a non-profit fund, was started in 2009 to allow family members to park monies and assets away to support their loved ones with special needs. The accounts can also be opened by children whose parents have acquired disabilities in old age or through accidents.

As of this month, 447 SNTC accounts have been opened. Two years ago, there were 300 accounts.

There is no official central registry of people with disabilities, but the Ministry of Social and Family Development estimates that 3 per cent of the resident population of 3.9 million have disabilities. That works out to 117,000 people thought to have disabilities.

Earlier this month, in the Committee of Supply debate, Social and Family Development Minister Tan Chuan-jin said SNTC will step up on outreach efforts to address caregivers' "major concern" about how their children with disabilities will be cared for after they die.

When an account is set up, social workers and caregivers look at how much a trustee needs for food, transport and medical services, among other things, and determine how the money will be spent when the trust is activated.

Mr Tan Ngan Seng took the advice of a lawyer to set up an SNTC account for Mr Ong so that the court would know how he intended to use the proceeds from the sale of the flat. "He has the mental capabilities of a three-year-old," said Mr Tan, who is also Mr Ong's caregiver.

Mr Ong's account is one of 19 that have started paying out money to the dependants.

Each month, the payment of his fees for Metta Home comes from SNTC. And if Mr Tan needs to draw additional funds, say, if his cousin fell ill, the withdrawal has to be approved by SNTC to ensure that there is no misuse of funds.

SNTC general manager Esther Tan said: "This means the deputy will not need to account to the relatives on how the monies are used, because SNTC takes over the disbursement of monies from the trust."

said: "It is also good for me. I'm relieved that there is long-term financial security for Yeow Ping for the rest of his life."

A trust fund requires just \$5,000 to be started, and caregivers are encouraged to pledge the proceeds from the future sale of their homes to it. They can also make a minimum top-up of \$500 at any time and the Government subsidises the set-up and activation fees.

Ms Tan said: "Our priority is to reach out to elderly parents or caregivers so that they can make plans, including setting up an SNTC trust, make their will and appoint deputies for their special needs dependants before they pass on."

She said targeting elderly caregivers was especially crucial so that cases like Mr Ong's can be avoided.

To do so, SNTC will partner grassroots leaders to reach out to Pioneer Generation Singaporeans with special needs dependants. It will also collaborate with hospitals, senior activity centres and family service centres, said Ms Tan.

An SNTC account is a crucial safeguard, she said. "Even if you can find somebody you trust to take care of your child when you die, what if the child outlives his caregiver?"

And if the person with disability dies, a residual beneficiary named by the parents - for example, an able-bodied brother - will inherit the unused portion.

